

## **The Anatomy of a Profession: Architects in Palestine during the British Mandate**

Gilbert Herbert and Ita Heinze-Greenberg

This article is a statistical study of the profession of the architect in Palestine during the British Mandate of the 1920s and 1930s. The study is based on data collected by the Documentation Unit of the Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning at the Technion: Israel Institute of Technology. The database records 595 people who lived in Palestine and worked there as architects.

**KEY WORDS** Architecture, Architectural Profession, Database, Palestine, Statistics

### **Introduction**

Outside Europe, the heartland of modern architecture, the most fertile ground for the spread of the International Style in the 1920s and 1930s was to be found in Brazil, South Africa, and Palestine (or Eretz Israel, as its Jewish inhabitants preferred to call it). In the first two instances the driving force for change derived from the initiative of highly motivated individuals, pioneers like Warchavchik, Costa, and Niemeyer, in Brazil; or Martienssen, Hanson, and McIntosh, in South Africa.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Palestine, however, the acknowledged leaders (Kauffmann, Karmi, Sharon, Rechter) consolidated and focused forces for change already evident in the work of a significant and ever-growing segment of the architectural profession. In other words, the momentum towards a modern architecture came from the architectural profession itself, as a broad-based movement of consensus. In the history of the dissemination of the International Style, this is a unique phenomenon.

At the beginning of the 1920s, architecture in Palestine was essentially traditional or eclectic. The late 1920s was a transitional period, as a more modern architecture began to emerge; and by 1929, in many towns and settlements, the new architecture was already making its presence felt. By 1939, it was the predominant mode, supported by the majority of the profession. While there were many objective reasons for this development in Palestine, to be sought in the challenges and constraints of settling the land of Israel in the crucial decades between the wars, the factors which concern us here are the unusual characteristics and the particular patterns of cultural diversity of the architectural profession itself.

There are two ways of looking at this profession, from the historian's viewpoint. The first is 'biographical', that is the study of the lives and works of leading members of the profession, firstly as individuals, and then in their interactions. In such an approach, which is qualitative, personal, intimate and

intensive, the historian is called upon to display insight and understanding into human motivations and group dynamics. The second way is 'statistical', that is the study of the profession as a whole, with a view to determining its principal characteristics. This work is extensive, impersonal, quantitative and analytical. Each approach yields valuable information, and generates understanding; they are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary. In choosing here to examine the nature of the architectural profession in a demographic fashion, analytically, we are aware that our statistical profile, in a sense the 'anatomy' of the profession, in no way replaces the necessity for live 'portraits' of its constituent members. We are confident, however, that there is much to learn from a study of the contextual professional framework within which the individual architect operates.

### **The Data Base**

This study is based on data collected by the Documentation Unit of the Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning, at the Technion: Israel Institute of Technology. We have at present in our data bank the names of 595 persons who had lived in Palestine, and worked there as architects,<sup>2</sup> at some time during the period under discussion, 1918–1948.<sup>3</sup> While this cannot be considered a complete register, we are confident, because of our extensive sources,<sup>4</sup> that it is a very comprehensive list, with only marginal omissions. Of the 595 persons named, we have sufficient (but not always complete) information on 470, and it this latter figure (adjusted in certain categories where specific items of information are lacking) which constitutes our sample, and the basis of all our analyses. Our sample therefore comprises 79% of the total list, which we consider to be a very representative group.

### **Cultural Diversity: Religion and Nationality**

The population of Mandated Palestine in 1922 was 752,048, of whom 589,177 were Moslems, 83,790 Jews, and 71,464 Christians. In 1944, out of a total of 1,739,642, there were 1,061,277 Moslems, 528,702 were Jews, and 135,547 Christians.<sup>5</sup> It would be reasonable to expect that the composition of the architectural profession would reflect these ethnic and religious distinctions. However, it must be noted that the overwhelming majority of our sample (96%) appears to be Jewish, with only a handful of Christian (European or Arab) or Moslem-Arab architects figuring in the list. Because of the comprehensiveness of our sources, we believe these figures do not distort the reality of the situation to any meaningful extent.

This one-sidedness should not be surprising, for objective reasons. Public works initiated by the Palestine administration were usually designed by non-Jewish architects in an official or quasi-official capacity, but often with Jewish professional assistance. By far the greatest bulk of architect-designed building in Palestine, however, was to house the rapidly-expanding Jewish community in the major urban areas and rural settlements, and to provide its institutional infrastructure. All these buildings were inevitably designed by Jewish architects.

Arab building, on the other hand, was predominantly rural, in the vernacular tradition, that is not designed by architects at all. Obviously, some public buildings in the Arab sector, such as mosques, were designed by Moslem architects, but where urban construction of a more prosaic kind, commercial or residential, demanded the intervention of an architect, Arab owners—who had initially used local German architects of the Christian Templer communities—turned more and more to Jewish architects.

In a qualitative study, we would of course be paying attention to significant work done by non-Jewish architects, despite their relatively few numbers: resident British architects such as Austen St.-Barbe Harrison or Clifford Holliday, Germans such as Adolf Rading, or Palestinian Arabs such as Imam-Hussein Rushdi. In a quantitative analysis, however, they do not emerge as a separate group. As the profession was, to all intents and purposes, overwhelmingly Jewish, that is homogeneous with respect to nominal religious affiliation, local ethnic and religious divisions are not a factor in our analyses. When we talk of cultural diversity, within the framework of this homogeneous group, we are therefore referring to national rather than religious parameters. This national diversity derives from the fact that we are dealing with an immigrant society, and therefore with a profession largely comprising immigrant architects. They are almost all Jewish, but they come from diverse national and cultural backgrounds. We examine this diversity from two points of view: origin, or place of birth; and place of professional education.

### **A Profession of Immigrants**

At the time of the British liberation of the Holy Land from Turkish rule in 1918, there was practically no architectural profession to speak of. By 1929, there were about 106 architects living and working in the country, including 15 native-born (8 Jews and 7 Arabs), with the remaining 86% newcomers. By 1939, the number of architects in our sample then living and working in Palestine had grown to 364.<sup>6</sup> Of these, the proportion of native-born architects (for simplicity, although somewhat anachronistically, we shall from now on call these 'Israelis') had done down to about 7.2%. Both the overall growth of the profession and the decreasing proportion of Israeli-born architects, in the two first decades of Britain's mandatory rule, was accounted for by two waves of immigration of Jewish professionals, that is to say, of both qualified architects and architects-to-be, as part of a much larger general pattern of immigration. There was a substantial wave of immigrants in the first half of the 1920s, largely as a result of the Balfour Declaration opening up Palestine as the national home of the Jews, for the idealists and the oppressed, for the Zionists and for those responding to the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, and the political turmoil of post-war Europe. Despite a slowdown from 1927–1931, there was a recorded immigration of 99,086 Jews during the decade 1920–1929. An even greater flood of immigration commenced in 1932, as a result of endemic economic crises and political unrest, the growing threat of anti-Semitism in Europe in general, and Hitler's punitive measures against the Jews, in particular. In this decade, 1930–1939, there was a further recorded immigration of 222,648 Jews.<sup>7</sup>

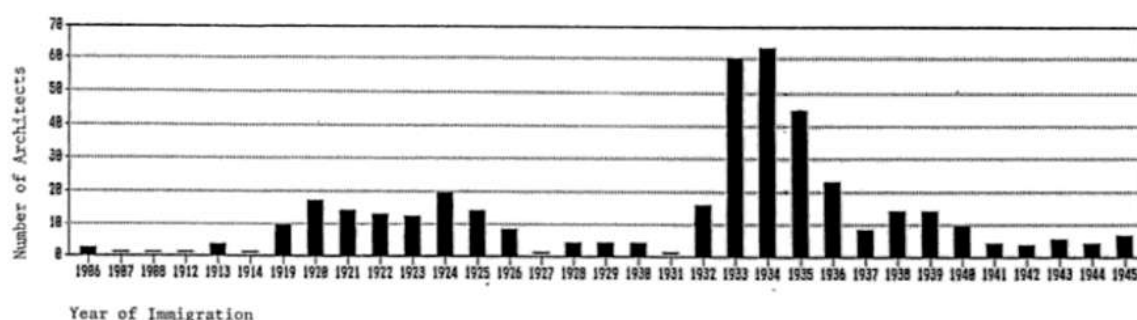


Towards the end of the 1930s, and well into the 1940s, because of British restrictions on immigration generally, and other problems arising out of the 1939–1945 war, the growth-rate of the overall population, and the profession in particular, slowed down. By the end of the Mandate, in 1948, the number of architects who had worked in the country, as far as can be ascertained, reached 595, of whom 470 constitute our sample. Taking the total number, it represents a ratio of architects to population of about 1:1,000 for the Jewish population, and 1:2,500 for the population as a whole.

### The Immigrant Architects: Countries of Origin

Of our sample of 470, only 34 were Israeli-born, the great majority coming as immigrants from more than twenty countries, mostly from East, Central and West Europe, some from North and South America, and even a few from the Arab countries of the Middle East. The most substantial immigration of architects was from Poland (117), Russia (109), and Germany (72), followed by Austria (29), Hungary (23), Rumania (19), and Czechoslovakia (19). It is apparent from these figures that, quantitatively speaking, the most significant sources of immigration were in Eastern Europe, with Germany and countries of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire playing a secondary role.

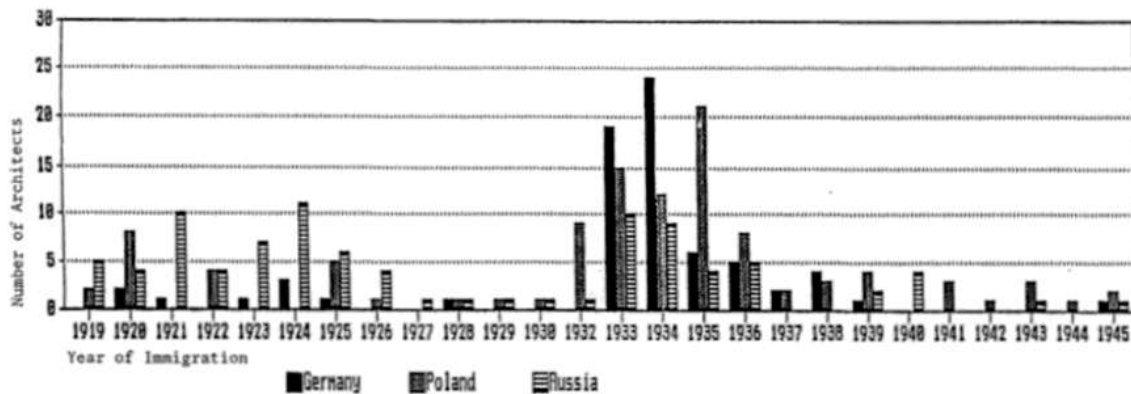
The rate of immigration, however, is not uniform. If we analyse the immigration of architects from the three major sources, Poland, Russia and Germany, we see that the time of their arrival in Palestine varies significantly, with the Russians (including Lithuanians and Latvians) predominant in the 1920s, and the Germans and Poles in a powerful cluster from 1933–1936 (together with a recurrence, smaller in number, of Russian immigration). In other words, the immigration of Russian architects is reasonably divided between the 1920s and 1930s; while the substantial presence of Polish and German-born architects is a phenomenon only of the mid-1930s. This influx of Polish and German professionals reflects general immigration trends of that time: in 1935, for instance, 3,931 Russians, 8,761 Germans, and 27,847 Poles came as immigrants to Palestine.



**Graph 1** Immigration of architects\*

(\* In all graphs the term 'architect' includes architects-to-be, that is those who qualify as architects after immigration)





Graph 2 Year of immigration of architects born in Germany, Poland and Russia

### Diversity of professional Training: A Diaspora Phenomenon

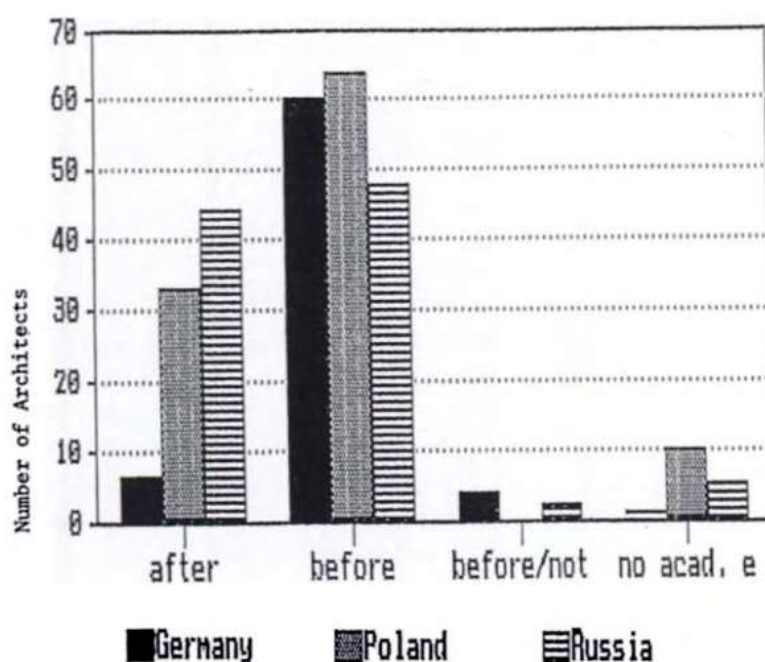
The flow of immigrants described above is historically regarded as the ingathering of the exiles. The countries of the world to which the Jews were dispersed in their two-thousand year saga of exile, are collectively known as the Diaspora. The cultural diversity of the architects who now returned to their homeland reflected the world-wide cultural kaleidoscope of the Diaspora, overlaid upon an enduring core of Jewish belief and tradition. This polychrome picture of cultural diversity, as it is expressed in the various countries of origin of the immigrant architects, is complicated further by the fact that their training often did not take place in the country of origin. 'Architectural culture' is coloured by the place of education; if it is in the country of origin, then we may usually expect a reinforcement of the native culture, but if it is in a foreign land, then we may expect a new cultural overlay, which inevitably alters architectural perceptions and practices.

As we have noted above, these immigrant 'architects' actually fall into two groups: qualified architects and architects-to-be. Up to 1939, which in terms of the development of modern architecture is the most significant period, we have details of the academic education of 303 immigrants. Of these, the great majority (about 74.6%) had qualified as architects (and a further 1.32% had studied, but were precluded from completing their training) before emigrating. By 1948, out of 378, the proportion was only a slightly less (69.8% + 1.58%). In other words, the majority of immigrant architects working in Palestine up to 1948 came with professional qualifications. If, however, we look at the three significant groups; Russia, Poland and Germany, we see an interesting difference. The Russians were divided almost equally between those already qualified, and architects-to-be; about two-thirds of the Poles were already qualified; but practically all the immigrants from Germany came to the country as professionally trained architects.

The immigrant architects-to-be (that is, those not yet qualified) joined with their Israeli-born colleagues in seeking an architectural training. Many were to find this in Palestine itself, graduating from the Technion in Haifa, where the only professional school of architecture in the country had been established in 1924, and where there were also associated studies in civil engineering. From the

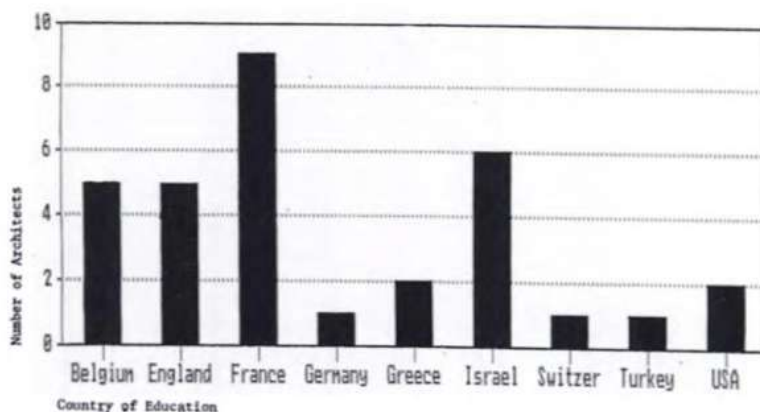
first graduating class of 1928, until 1945, 110 architects (or engineers working as architects) graduated from the Technion, of whom 88 are included in our sample. Of these, there was a scattering of students from many lands of the diaspora, a handful were Israelis, but no less than 55 came from Russia and Poland.

The remaining candidates for training (both Israelis and unqualified immigrants) went overseas to seek an education.

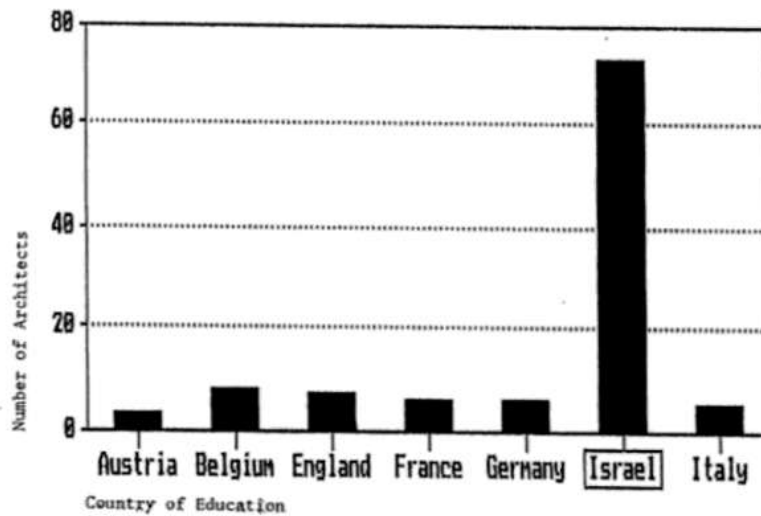


**Graph 3** Relation of time of professional education to date of immigration of architects born in Germany, Poland and Russia

after: professional education after immigration  
 before: professional education before immigration  
 before/not: professional education before immigration but not completed  
 no acad. e: no academic education



**Graph 4** Country of education of architects born in Palestine



**Graph 5** Country of education of architects who qualified after immigration

As opposed to the handful of Israelis who studied at the Technion, some 26 went to Europe, notably to France, Belgium and England. They were joined overseas by some 35 former immigrants, returning to Europe—but not usually to their native lands—to study.

The outcome of all these various factors was that, up till 1939 (that is, covering the architecturally critical period of the 1930s), the great majority (nearly 86%) of all architects in the country, whether immigrant or Israeli, whether trained prior to immigration or later, received their professional training not in Palestine itself, but overseas. And by 1948, notwithstanding the steady production of Technion graduates, this figure still remained high, at over 81%. In other words, not only was the profession largely composed of immigrants of diverse nationalities (mainly Russian, Polish and German), but it was a profession whose training also derived from sources outside of Palestine.

### The Disproportionate Influence of Germany

What were these sources: just where—that is in what countries—did this professional training take place? Of the 470 architects of our sample, we have no information on 19, and 23 had no academic education at all. The remaining 428 were educated in the following countries:

Germany:	62 German-born + 43 others*	= 105
Palestine:	6 Israeli-born + 82 others	= 88
Austria:	17 Austrian-born + 24 others	= 41
Czechoslovakia:	13 Czech-born + 20 others	= 33
France:	1 French-born + 31 others	= 32
Gt. Britain:	12 British-born + 17 others	= 29
Poland:	16 Polish-born + 7 others	= 23
Belgium:	1 Belgian-born + 19 others	= 20



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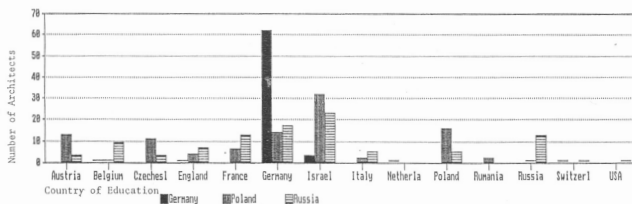
Russia:	13 Russian-born + 1 other	=	14
Italy:	0 Italian-born + 12 others	=	12
8 other countries:			<u>31</u>
			<u>428</u>

[\*others: including a few whose place of birth is unknown]

In attempting to understand the significance of these figures, let us start with Palestine itself, for architectural education in Palestine, at the Haifa Technion, constitutes a unique case. Here is an exception to the rule, that a national school of architecture reinforces the national architectural culture. We are dealing with a newly-established and cosmopolitan society of immigrants, steeped in the acquired culture of the foster-nations from which they came, and still more deeply rooted in their immediate origins (or perhaps the ancient mores and shared heritage of the Jewish people) than in the yet-to-be assimilated environment of their regained patrimony. In other words, we are dealing with a pioneer generation which has yet to establish its new identity and synthesise its own culture. The school of architecture itself must be seen as a microcosm of this society in the making, with its predominantly immigrant teachers and student body reflecting the same diverse cultural patterns. If, within this cultural pluralism, the Technion at that time could be said to have had any singular direction, then it would have been, not local, but German. The Technion as a whole had a strong German orientation, being a product of the initiative of the Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden.<sup>8</sup> The Technion's school of architecture was directed by the German-Jewish architect Alexander Baerwald, until his death in 1930, and thereafter by his successor Johanan Ratner who, although Russian born, was trained at the Technische Hochschule in Karlsruhe.

Apart from the reinforcement it received from within Palestine itself, Germany is undoubtedly the most important foreign country, as far as education is concerned. As we see from our list above, not only were the great majority of Palestinian architects of German-Jewish origin educated there, but also a large number of other immigrant architects, including 17 Jewish architects of Russian, and 14 of Polish, origin. Germany, therefore, in addition to its virtual monopoly of the education of native German-Jews who emigrated to Palestine, had in addition a considerable influence on the architectural education, and therefore the culture, of many immigrants from other lands. Compare this with the case of Poland, where only 7 foreign students were to be found, none of them German, or with Russia, with only 1 foreign student. The distribution of students from the three main national groups: Russia, Poland and Germany, is clearly indicated on the graph below. It will be seen that, in contrast to the concentration in their native Germany of students (later to be architects in Palestine) of German-Jewish origin, students of Russian and Polish-Jewish origin were widely distributed throughout the architectural schools of Europe, with a particularly strong presence in Germany.

Through its dominance of architectural education, it would be reasonable to infer a strong measure of German architectural influence in Palestine at this time. This German influence was reinforced by the similar role played by its culturally-related neighbour Austria, as well as the German Technische Hochschule of



Graph 5 Country of education of architects born in Germany, Poland and Russia

Prague and Brno, in Czechoslovakia. We are therefore confronted with a paradoxical situation. The predominant culture of the Jewish community in Palestine, the 'yishuv', in the 1920s and 1930s, in its background of traditional Judaism, in its political philosophy and ideology, in its folk-music, arts, literature and theatre, derived from the Eastern European roots of the majority of its leaders and intellectuals. The greatest number of architects were also from Eastern Europe, especially Poland and Russia. However, the predominant architectural culture, because of the educational pattern, came to be German.

The cultural thrust of German education is given a particular colouration by the concentration on a specific type of education in Germany, namely that provided by the Technische Hochschule, where 85 architects who were later to work in Palestine received their education, mainly at Stuttgart, Dresden, Munich and Darmstadt, and especially Berlin-Charlottenburg, where no less than 38 of our sample studied. (To put this in perspective, we should note that only about a dozen of our sample studied at this time at the famed Ecoles of Paris). To this must be added the 25 students at the Technische Hochschule in Vienna, and the 25–30 who studied in German-language Technische Hochschule in Czechoslovakia. German architectural influence was given a further qualitative edge (this perhaps outside our terms of reference, but interesting to note nevertheless) by the seven students who came to Palestine from the Bauhaus.

Finally, another noteworthy point is the position of Great Britain. The number of British-born and educated architects in the country (12) was perhaps marginal, but a fair number of other nationalities, including Russians, Poles and Israelis, made up the 29 of our sample who studied in England. This number was sufficient to contribute to the British architectural presence in Palestine, but not to expand it to any significant degree. Britain however was the mandatory power, and was thus in a unique position to exercise its cultural influence in architectural matters, through its legislative and administrative controls of building and planning, and through the exemplary impact of its official architecture. It was this disproportionate concentration of British-educated architects in official positions, rather than any significance deriving from absolute numbers, which ultimately was decisive in determining the conservative British imprint on the public architecture of Palestine. This stood in marked contrast to the avant-garde character of the architecture of the Jewish sector.

## A Profession of Young Pioneers

We have made the point above, that the Jewish resettlement of Palestine in the period following the Balfour Declaration and the establishment of the British Mandate was in every sense a pioneer undertaking. This is certainly true of the generation of architects who built its cities and settlements during this period. They were pioneers not only in terms of their own perceptions, and in terms of the historic task they confronted, but also (and this is our special interest here) in terms of the composition of the professional group to which they belonged.

They were pioneers because they were newcomers making a new world. Not only were they immigrants, as we have seen, but they were *recent* immigrants. By 1929, at the end of the first decade, 85% of immigrant architects had been in the country for less than ten years, and 25% for less than five years. By 1939, the end of the second—and architecturally critical—decade, there were still 66.4% of immigrant architects who had been in the country for less than ten years. They were pioneers, therefore, in the sense that they were still in the process of assimilating and adjusting to their new world.

Not only was it a new world, but one which could provide no body of accumulated wisdom, no basis of past experience which they could build upon, no precedents or models which they perceived to be relevant to their present tasks. They were relatively inexperienced in their profession, and there were so few who had gone before. By 1939, 75.5% of architects working in Palestine had done so for less than ten years.

But if they lacked the experience and wisdom which comes with age, then at least they had the energy, optimism and courage which comes with youth. They were so young. By 1929, when the first critical moves towards a modern architecture were being taken, half the architectural population was under the age of 30, and a further 32% under the age of 40. Ten years later, at the end of the almost universal acceptance of modern architecture, while the number under the age of 30 had dropped to 23.6%, the number under 40 still remained an amazing 70.2%, with nearly 90% of the profession under 50 years of age. As with the architects of the Chicago School, at the end of the previous century, it was the young architects who pioneered the new architecture of a frontier society.

## Conclusion

There are several characteristics of the development of the modern movement in British Mandated Palestine. It was an overwhelmingly Jewish movement, adapted to the pressing needs of the Zionist venture in Eretz Israel. It developed earlier than other comparable movements outside of mainland Europe. It was an architecture which derived from the body of the profession, rather than imposed by an inspired leadership. It was a popular movement, far more universally acceptable by architects and clients than was usually the case. Within the closed world of the 'Yishuv' it was not regarded as a revolutionary architecture, fighting to supplant the old order, but the appropriate expression of a new architecture for a new society. It was vigorous, energetic and courageous, but somewhat brash, in many cases lacking refinement and maturity. And it was



overwhelmingly Germanic in feeling. Whereas architecture in South Africa and Brazil saw Le Corbusier as the 'fons et origo', the godfather of the modern movement, in Palestine between the wars Corbusian influence was the exception, not the rule. In Tel Aviv, Haifa, even traditional Jerusalem, in the villages and kibbutzim, the predominant influences are Wagner, Loos, Mendelsohn, Taut, May and Gropius. It is not altogether accurate, but not entirely inappropriate, that the architecture of the period has been called 'Bauhaus' architecture. While there are many factors which combine to generate this composite picture of the development of modern architecture in Palestine, it is our belief that the particular profile of the architectural profession—itself a function of the historical process—which we have sketched out in this paper, is helpful in understanding a unique situation in the dissemination of the International Style.

Haifa, February 1990

#### Notes

1. For a comparative study of the development of modern architecture see Gilbert Herbert: 'On the fringes of the International Style: transmissions and transformations' *Architecture SA*, Sept/Oct 1987, pp. 36–43.
2. Let us define our terms. When the phrase 'who had lived and worked in Palestine' (up to a particular time) is used, it signifies a number almost, but not quite, the same as the total number then working, as it includes a few who might have died or left the country during the period under discussion. It excludes those architects (such as Arthur Korn, Richard Neutra or Adolf Loos), who designed buildings in Palestine, but at no time lived there. We use the term 'Architect' in this paper to describe all those, whether qualified as architects or engineers, who practised as architects, who designated themselves as architects, and/or who were so listed in the registers of the Israel Association of Engineers and Architects.
3. The period 1918–1948 covers the period of British Administration in Palestine, whether in the form of the military and civil administrations, or the formal mandate of the League of Nations.
4. Our sources include, inter alia, the files of the Association of Engineers and Architects in Israel, the recorded lists of Technion graduates, various volumes of *Who's Who* in Palestine, official yearbooks and directories, documents in the State Archives and the Central Zionist Archives, records in the City Engineer's Offices of major cities, various city archives, documents in the Public Records Office London, records of the RIBA, extensive literature searches in contemporary Palestine journals, publications of the Documentation Unit of the Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning of the Technion, the researches of Silvina Sosnovsky and Aharon Ron Fuchs, the works on Jerusalem by David Kroyanker, and many interviews with survivors of the period.
5. *Anglo-Palestine Yearbook* 1946, p. 33.
6. In this instance, the number excludes those who had left Palestine, or had died, prior to 1939. The actual number of those then living and working in Palestine may be greater, but we have included only those cases where the evidence is clear.
7. *Anglo-Palestine Yearbook* 1946, p. 39.
8. For a history of the Technion see Carl Alpert: *Technion: the story of Israel's Institute of Technology*, New York, 1982.



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ISSN 1048-6798  
ISBN 3-7186-5482-2  
CHIAEF 4, 1-90  
Volume 4.1 (1993)



harwood academic publishers  
Published in Switzerland

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